

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry into Australia's Overseas Aid and Development Assistance Program

(Senators Helen Kroger, Ursula Stephens, Lee Rhiannon, Sam Dastyari, David Fawcett, David Sullivan (Committee Secretary))

Statement Feb 21st 2014.

Joanna Hayter, CEO International Women's Development Agency.

Good morning everyone

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Committee today, which in my case brings a lens of analysis that looks at the implications of aid cuts in regards to gender equality and women's empowerment and the profound impact that this has for every aspect of Australia's aid program.

In the IWDA submission we reiterated the statements we have heard and read that the government is committed to investing in aid with the aim of 'lifting the living standards of the most vulnerable people in our region through aid for trade, better health and education outcomes, empowering women and girls and leveraging private sector involvement.'

The starting assumption must surely also be that Australia's aid program equitably benefits women and girls, men and boys and helps ensure a child's life chances don't depend on whether we are born a boy or a girl.

So do we have this ability to deliver these goals? Have the aid cuts we have seen from both sides of government since 2013 undermined our nations stated goals for development? We believe so.

Australia has not and cannot currently deliver its stated policy objectives and commitment on gender equality because it hasn't matched policy commitment with investment and accountability. Nor has it followed up with consistent implementation and resourcing in line with these commitments.

Our submission refers to specific cuts that illustrate this point but today I want to focus on what's needed to align our future aid program with commitments successive governments have made. People have made these commitments on the premise that gender equality matters, now we need to act as if this were true.

Currently in Australia as elsewhere, we see gender equality promoted through targeted programs that address disadvantage (e.g. services that respond to violence against women) and the integration or mainstreaming of gender equality concerns throughout the aid program. What this means is that **responsibility for advancing gender equality sits with everybody involved in the aid program not just a particular section.**

But without the appropriate planning and reporting tools particularly budget reporting tools, all we see and count or measure is the money going to these specific programs but no visibility for the bulk of work that is supposed to be happening throughout the whole of the aid program. This means that **gender equality is everywhere but nowhere**. This is a problem for decision makers and stakeholders alike because it is simply not possible to know how policy commitments are being given effect in programs *and* in expenditure.

‘We manage what we measure and in turn, what we measure affects what we do’. UNDP Istanbul Declaration.

In this context, the aid cuts are of concern for two reasons:

- 1) We’re already not spending enough to reach the commitment we’ve made and these cuts take us further way; and
- 2) We don’t know the full implications of the cuts for gender equality and women’s empowerment work because this expenditure and associated activities are hidden inside country allocations or within the cross regional programs.

By way of example, I draw the Committee’s attention to the latest Program Performance Reports released recently by DFAT. The 2012/13 PNG Report shows us that in a country program budget totaling \$448.5mil, estimated expenditure directly earmarked for gender equality and women’s empowerment was \$2.9 mil or 1% of Australia’s bilateral program. There is no doubt that gender equality and women’s empowerment is being progressed through other dimensions of the program *but* none of us can see where or how, or how significant it is.

We are concerned about the **policy evaporation** where policy commitments are not translating consistently into programs and resourcing. We are concerned how unclear it is on how we will capture and plan for the gender impact of spending in this and subsequent budgets.

We need systems and tools that help us to see where the money actually goes.

The benchmarking process the government is currently engaged in – provides an opportunity to build the systems and processes that will connect what the Government says with what it does.

Gender budgeting would be a useful companion to the focus on benchmarks. We already have experience as a nation on how this can be done. The Office for Women, the Dept. of Finance and teams of gender specialists from across our sector can enable this again.

I also encourage the government to take guidance from the 2012 OECD ‘Closing the Gender Gap’ report. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. It is written with governments in mind to assist implementation.

As I close, I would like to leave the Committee with a thought about Innovation. Aid cuts and the freezing of the aid program make it all the harder to invest in innovation that may have profound impacts in the medium to long term but will never make it to the top of the priority list which is what happens in a context of constraint. **Without exploration - there can be no discovery.**

My final comment - If our aid program is serious about changing lives and strengthening nations and economies, then cutting aid does not look like we're acting as if that's so, nor are we resourcing it as if it's true. The cuts to aid don't match what we say with what we do and it doesn't match what the problem requires, in terms of dismantling inequality.

Thank you.